

VZCZCXRO1566
RR RUEHIK RUEHYG
DE RUEHLO #0374/01 0291717
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 291717Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1566
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 000374

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MNUC](#) [PARM](#) [MOPS](#) [UK](#)

SUBJECT: UK PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE HEARS POSITIVE VIEWS ON
RENEWAL OF UK STRATEGIC NUCLEAR DETERRENT

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Defense Select Committee of the UK House of Commons met with five experts in nuclear arms and defense policy on January 23 to hear views on HMG's recent white paper endorsing a renewal of the UK's existing submarine-based nuclear deterrent. Although the MPs heard some voices in opposition to the timing of the government's plans to upgrade its existing nuclear submarine force, the general consensus of the experts was that UK national security requirements, even in a post-Cold War world, require a nuclear deterrent. End Summary.

Views of UK and U.S. Experts

¶2. (U) The Defense Committee asked a group of US and UK think tank-based experts to testify on the Blair Government's recent publication, "The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: The White Paper," which spelled out the UK Government's decision to retain and upgrade Britain's submarine-based nuclear deterrent capability. The experts appearing before the committee:

- Prof. Richard L. Garwin of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences
- Mr. Paul Ingram of the British American Security Information Council (BASIC)
- Dr. Stephen Pullinger of the International Security Information Service (ISIS) Europe
- Dr. Jeremy Stocker of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)
- Dr. Lee Willett of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)

¶3. (U) The focus of the hearing, led by the Committee's chairman James Arbuthnot, a Conservative Party MP, was to review the arguments put forward by the Blair Government for retention and renewal of the UK's current deterrent capability. Key points made at the hearing are summarized below.

Deterrent Still Needed, But When to Build?

¶4. (SBU) The MPs heard a general consensus from the experts -- with the exception of Ingram (BASIC) -- that the Blair Government's decision to replace the existing Trident system was the right one, despite some drawbacks. Asked for an overall assessment, Stocker of the IISS said that although there were gaps, the White Paper "got everything right." Dr. Pullinger (ISIS) endorsed retaining a nuclear deterrent, but told MPs that the White Paper underestimated the threat to UK national security of WMD proliferation to non-state actors and did not prioritize it highly enough in laying out the case for a nuclear deterrent. RUSI's Willett endorsed the decision to retain and upgrade the existing system, as well as praised the Government's "comprehensive" policy paper, though he acknowledged the paper lacked details on deterrence policy and counter-proliferation because these issues are

difficult to discuss in a public document.

15. (U) Ingram, the most critical of the witnesses about the Government's plans, said the White Paper demonstrated overcautiousness and "institutional momentum" in refusing to consider dramatic new policies, such as disarmament. Ingram argued that non-nuclear states would consider London's decision to renew its nuclear capability "provocative" and a breach of its NPT commitments to eliminate nuclear weapons.

16. (SBU) Professor Garwin of the U.S. National Academy of Science argued that the White Paper's recommendation to begin construction of additional submarines was premature. He noted that in 1998 the U.S. extended the service life of its Vanguard-class subs from 30 to 40-45 years. Considering the U.S. subs spend two-thirds of their lives at sea, whereas the British Vanguards spend only one-quarter of their time at sea, Garwin questioned the White Paper's assertion that the UK's subs would have to be retired in 2023-2029 and argued that they could be extended at least an additional 15 years like their U.S. counterparts. Garwin's argument was rebutted, however, by RUSI's Willett who noted that the UK's Vanguard submarines were a less expensive model than the U.S. sub force (Embassy Comment: A point confirmed to us by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. End comment) so the lifespan of the UK submarine force and the impact of its shorter operational deployment schedule could not be extrapolated from a strict comparison to the U.S. force.

Procurement Capabilities

17. (U) Much of the Committee's interest focused on the experts' views of the optimal time frame required for developing a successor submarine-based nuclear force. Professor Garwin explained that costs often rise during

LONDON 00000374 002 OF 002

production, therefore it was speculative for the White Paper to argue that it is more cost effective to replace rather than refurbish the existing force. He argued that a refurbishment to extend the current force by 10 years would allow HMG to invest in a smaller, more advanced submarine and missile system later on. (Comment: Garwin also argued in his written submission, but not in person, that the UK's security is more imperiled than supported than supported by the existence of nuclear weapons. End Comment.) Asked if the White Paper's warnings were exaggerated about valuable submarine-building skills within the UK work force being lost if new submarines were not ordered now, Ingram replied these skills are transferable and could be brought back to the UK when needed, so it would be advantageous to delay the decision on a new replacement to allow Parliament and the British people to reach a full consensus on a deterrent. Willett of RUSI disagreed, saying further delay would cost more because a three-year refurbishment would be so costly and only extend the UK submarines lifespan by 10 years.

Comment

18. (SBU) The expert witnesses by and large did not question the Blair Government's recommendation to continue as a nuclear weapon state, mirroring the apparent consensus on this decision within Parliament and much of the British media. The exception were Ingram and Garwin, who argued that doing so would harm the UK's counter-proliferation goals. The most heated discussion arose when Professor Garwin, the American expert, advocated delaying the decision to build a new sub force because a delay would not threaten the British sub building skill base, a claim made in HMG's White Paper.

19. (U) For copies of the written testimonies by the experts, please e-mail Terrence M. Dillon at DillonTM@state.gov

Visit London's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/london/index.cfm>
Tuttle